

## In Memory of a Supervisor

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John Killeen had all the qualities of a good teacher. Pleasant, patient, witty and knowledgeable: he was not only a friendly teacher; he was a teacher-friend. He was my principal supervisor for my PhD, but sadly did not live to attend the viva last February. Yet I felt that he was present in spirit.

Going through our correspondence that spans more than 10 years, I found this combination of teaching and friendship shining through. My first research ideas were hazy, but thanks to John's comments and directions, they gradually became clearer. I can see that it is he who points out to me in a letter from 1995 that I am in fact thinking about two distinct studies which share the same sample: something that is very convenient, but at the same time difficult to deal with. He encouraged me to pursue the two paths and "join" the studies "at the hip" as he often used to say. This was not always easy — a bit like learning to speak two languages at a time.

In 1997 I was still struggling to write my transfer report and complained about being blocked in my writing. He answered:

"You use words like 'afraid'. Does this mean that you become nervous and hesitant when you try to do this? This is common and can be disabling. Courage! You should try to set aside your inhibitions and write things out for yourself, even if they seem messy or foolish. All sorts of things happen in the mental boudoir which we would be embarrassed to put on public display, but even the strictest Calvinist recognises that they are necessary to procreation. Remember, that on another day you can adopt a more critical perspective, and review what you have written, putting it into order and throwing away the rubbish" (22.7.1997).

As I know well now, one of John's qualities was that he had a wide horizon within the field of career development, ranging from sociology to psychology and education, and his knowledge of methodology was extensive. This wide range was invaluable. For example, I remember him saying that a good theory of interests did not yet exist, or that the measures of career maturity were not being used as much as before. Such comments not only gave an overview over a vast field, but were also stimulating in looking for new ways of theorising career development.

In a tutorial I had on 21 September 2001 at John's home in London, I can see from my notes that we were discussing the developmental aspects of the *habitus* construct and how in research the objective is to examine real phenomena that

exist out there. Different theoretical approaches can be used to describe bits of the same phenomena. John's wide theoretical horizon made such a comment natural to him, but to me this was a moment of learning. His background as a sociologist made him question whether it is the individual adolescent who makes the career decision, or rather, whether it is more fruitful to talk about the decision-making unit, i.e. the family and important others, that constructs a career decision or develops career strategies.

Most of our correspondence evolves around methodology and statistics: design, questionnaires, data analysis and planning - "a plan is so important – so that you do not forget where you are going and why" (20.2.1998). His encouraging and witty comments are prevalent in his letters, one example being his comments on patience in data analysis: "Patient steps are what is needed. It can be a bit of a dredge, but grit your teeth" (28.11.2000).

His humorous side also shines through in what he writes about the English language: "I think you should make a point of the apparent fact that about 2% of variance is explained, noting that it is small. In English we call this 'grasping the nettle' i.e. if you take a firm hold of something that can harm you it does not hurt you (do not test the literal truth of the expression, it is erroneous. We have another expression 'take the bull by the horns' which is equally dangerous advice)" (22.7.1997).

The outcome of this long and often arduous work was a thesis containing two different researches: evaluative research on two different types of careers education, and research on social group differences in occupational conceptualisations.

To give some insight into John's contribution to one of the two research projects, I want to mention some points he stressed in the preparation and implementation of an evaluative research of guidance outcomes. In educational research, children cannot be randomly assigned to different groups, mainly for ethical and financial reasons. The selection of schools or classes is bound to give non-equivalent groups, although by choosing many schools for the sample, school effects can be avoided. In a non-equivalent group study, the researcher has to bear in mind that any difference found between groups could be for some other reason than treatment. A multivariate method, such as logistic regression, is used to explain away differences such as gender, grades or social class. If the researcher cannot explain

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differences from the multivariate analysis, confidence can be built in the conclusion.

In the analysis of the evaluative data we follow these steps:

1. Examine how the groups differ on all measured independent variables.
2. If there is a difference, see if any of these are related to outcomes.
3. For those that are, exert control (multivariate analysis) and see if the sample differences in outcomes are affecting results.
4. Even where 1 and 2 do not lead to suspicions of confounding, there is always the possibility of more complicated interactions between sample group, measured independent variables and outcomes.

This description only gives an idea of what John's teaching was about: the emphasis on being systematic and careful when doing quasi-experimental research; never jumping to conclusions. John was adamant in his criticism of evaluation studies that do not adhere to these scientific principles. Formative evaluation studies in guidance aim at programme improvement; summative evaluation studies determine whether the guidance or careers education programme serves the purpose for which it was instituted (Killeen, 1996). As can be seen from John's writings on evaluation, it was of utmost importance to him that results from evaluation studies were trustworthy.

At the journey's end, I would like to express my gratitude to John for his guidance. I was not the easiest of students. I lived far away, was a mother of young children, and was submerged with work as a lecturer and director of the counsellor training programme at the University of Iceland. In addition, I had never attended a British university, my previous training having been in France. It took a leap of faith to believe in my capacity to do research in this field. Being the broadminded scholar he was, this did not bother John: what mattered was research.